

SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
RAFAEL PAYARE'S OPENING WEEKEND: MAHLER 5
A Jacobs Masterworks Concert
Rafael Payare, conductor

October 5 and 6, 2019

MASON BATES

Alternative Energy

Ford's Farm, 1896

Chicago, 2012

Ninjiang Province, 2112

Reykjavik, 2222

INTERMISSION

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor

PART I

1. Trauermarsch.

2. Stürmisch bewegt

PART II

3. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

PART III

4. Adagietto

5. Rondo-Finale

Alternative Energy

MASON BATES

Born January 23, 1977, Richmond, Virginia

Mason Bates attended Columbia University-Juilliard School, where he studied with John Corigliano, and later earned a Ph.D. in composition at Berkeley. Since then, he has been based in the San Francisco Bay area, where he composes, works as a DJ, curates concerts and has worked to fuse traditional classical music, electronics and club music. From 2010 to 2015 he served as composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which has premiered and recorded a number of his works. In 2015 Bates was the first composer-in-residence at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and in 2017 *Musical America* named him Composer of the Year. His opera *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* won the 2019 Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording.

Alternative Energy was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Bates composed it in 2011. Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony gave the premiere on February 2, 2012 and later recorded it. The composer has supplied a program note:

Alternative Energy is an ‘energy symphony’ spanning four movements and hundreds of years. Beginning in a rustic Midwestern junkyard in the late 19th Century, the piece travels through ever greater and more powerful forces of energy – a present-day particle collider, a futuristic Chinese nuclear plant – until it reaches a future Icelandic rainforest, where humanity’s last inhabitants seek a return to a simpler way of life.

The *idée fixe* that links these disparate worlds appears early in “Ford’s Farm, 1896.” This melody is heard on the fiddle – conjuring a figure like Henry Ford – and is accompanied by junkyard percussion and a ‘phantom orchestra’ that trails the fiddler like ghosts. The *accelerando* cranking of a car motor becomes a special motif in the piece, a kind of rhythmic embodiment of ever-more-powerful energy. Indeed, this crank motif explodes in the electronics in the second movement’s present-day Chicago, where we encounter actual recordings from the Fermi Lab particle collider. Hip-hop beats, jazzy brass interjections, and joyous voltage surges bring the movement to a clangorous finish.

Zoom a hundred years into the dark future of the “Xinjiang Province, 2112” where a great deal of the Chinese energy industry is based. On an eerie wasteland, a lone flute sings a

tragically distorted version of the fiddle tune, dreaming of a forgotten natural world. But a powerful industrial energy simmers to the surface, and over the ensuing hardcore techno, wild orchestral splashes drive us to a catastrophic meltdown. As the smoke clears, we find ourselves even further into the future: an Icelandic rainforest on a hotter planet. Gentle, out-of-tune pizzicato accompany our fiddler, who returns over a woody percussion ensemble to make a quiet plea for simpler times. (-Mason Bates)

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor
GUSTAV MAHLER
Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia
Died May 18, 1911, Vienna

In the summer of 1901 Mahler retreated to the new chalet he had built at Maiernigg, on the southern shore of the Wörthersee in central Austria. At age 41, he was ready for new directions, and now—looking out over that sunny lake—he turned away from the manner of his first four symphonies, which had been inspired by the Wunderhorn folk-legends and based on the music of his own songs. That summer Mahler composed a single movement, a huge symphonic scherzo, and he himself seemed stunned by what he had created. To a friend he wrote that this was music of “unparalleled strength” showing “man in the full light of day who has reached the summit of his existence.” He went on to describe it as “totally unlike anything I have written before... Each note in it is profoundly alive, and the whole thing spins like a whirlwind or a comet’s tail.” Yet this movement was not part of a preconceived symphonic plan, and Mahler faced the task of creating a symphony that incorporated this movement.

This he did over the following summer, also spent at Maiernigg. There had been many changes in Mahler’s life since the previous summer. He had met and married Alma Schindler and they were expecting their first child, he had conducted the premieres of his Third and Fourth Symphonies, and he had begun to re-study the music of Bach. Now he returned to his Fifth Symphony and completed it by working outward from the scherzo he had composed the previous summer. He placed the scherzo at the center of the symphony, prefacing it with an opening section consisting of two movements that share thematic material and concluding with another two-movement section, again based on shared material. The result was a five-movement symphony in three massive parts, and its premiere in Cologne on October 18, 1904, was a

complete failure with an audience unprepared for its stupendous power and dramatic scope. Yet a century later, the Fifth has become one of Mahler's most popular symphonies, and one critic has gone so far as to call it "one of the seven wonders of the symphonic world."

The structure of the Fifth Symphony is completely original. The first part opens with a movement Mahler calls *Funeral March*, and he specifies that it should be played "At a Measured Gait, Heavy, Like a Cortège." Solo trumpet sounds an ominous fanfare, and a mighty orchestral explosion leads to the grieving funeral march in the strings. This march will return throughout this episodic movement, which is interrupted by two interludes: a strident outburst and – near the end – a gentle dance derived from the funeral march. The music rises to a searing climax marked "Grieving," then subsides to conclude with a single pizzicato stroke.

The lamenting second movement, which Mahler marks "Moving Stormily, With the Greatest Vehemence," treats material introduced in the first movement: back come reminiscences of the funeral march and other bits of themes, now developed with frenzied violence. This frantic atmosphere is broken by haunting interludes, also derived from the first movement, before the music rises to what seems to be a triumphant chorale. But this chorale brings no true release, and the music falls away to the same sort of ambiguous ending that concluded the first movement.

At the center of the symphony is that mighty scherzo, in which the solo French horn plays a central role. This movement is a vast symphonic celebration, built around a series of dances that pitch between the wild energy of the *ländler* and the sinuous lilt of the waltz. The solo horn binds together the various sections of this scherzo, the longest movement in the symphony, and finally leads it to a close on two mighty strokes derived from the opening horn call.

The final part begins with a complete change. Gone suddenly are the seething energy and violence of the first three movements, and in their place Mahler offers music of delicacy and restraint. The *Adagietto*, scored for strings and harp, is an island of calm. (This movement was often performed by itself during the decades before Mahler's music became popular.) Its bittersweet melodies sing gracefully, rise to a soaring climax, and fall back to a quiet close. Out of that quiet, a single horn note suddenly rivets attention, and the concluding movement stirs to life.

In the brief introduction to this finale, Mahler offers much of the material he will use

here, and then this *Rondo-Finale* surges into motion as horns sing the rondo theme. This movement overflows with energy, new ideas and contrapuntal writing (do we hear the results of Mahler's Bach studies here?), and along the way the main theme of the gentle *Adagietto* is swept up in the fun and made to sing with unsuspected energy. The movement culminates in a great chorale – here, finally, is the true climax – and the Fifth Symphony drives to an earthshaking close.

Music so dramatic seems to suggest a program, some extra-musical drama being played out across the span of this intense symphony. Some critics have heard it as the triumph of life over death. Others, picking up Mahler's cue that the central movement depicts a "man in the full light of day," see it as the tale of a hero who moves from the tragedy of the opening to life in the scherzo and to celebration in the finale. Yet another offers an even more philosophical reading, believing that the symphony is almost "schizophrenic, in that the most tragic and the most joyful worlds of feeling are separated off from one another, and only bound together by Mahler's unmistakable command of large-scale symphonic construction and unification."

Such searches for "meaning" can seem ludicrous, even as one sympathizes with the effort to try to come to terms with this music in mere words. One wonders what Mahler would have made of these interpretations. For, despite his occasional use of a program in the generative stages of the symphony, he finally conceived of this music as abstract, as absolute music complete in itself. Rather than straining for cumbersome interpretations that might be true, it is far better to enjoy Mahler's Fifth as the great symphonic adventure it actually is.

-Program note by Eric Bromberger

PROGRAM HISTORY

By Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, San Diego Symphony Archivist

Appropriately, our new music director is beginning the opening concert of his newly-official tenure with a piece by Mason Bates, whose music has never until now been performed here. On the other hand, the great Fifth Symphony by Gustav Mahler was first played by the Orchestra under the direction of Peter Erős in the 1970s. It has since been played here for ten more outings in the Masterworks Series. Most recently, Jahja Ling conducted two presentations here during the 2002-03 and 2011-12 seasons.